

# Seizures for Dostoyevsky

I've been camping all weekend, and I'm exhausted.

I finally get home, back to my bedroom, decorated with posters of stars and dinosaurs. I'm twelve; it's time to "adult" up my room before my friends start making fun of me.

I collapse in my bed. It's only 5 pm, but I've been sleeping in the dirt for two days.

As I doze into unconsciousness, my brain sputters like a car from the 70s.

Then, it full-on seizes. The right side of my body starts pulsing with demon-like contortions. I can't breathe. I can't call for help. I just lie there and *wait*.

While waiting (and not breathing), I have an unexplainable subjective experience. This is where words lose power....*strange shapes, colors, and a feeling of being "one."* What does that even mean? More on that later.

Finally, it's done. I sip at the air. My lips are blue. The left side of my brain (which controls the right side of my body) is now "off." I can't move my right side.

I try to yank myself out of my bed with just my left arm. I pull myself up and stagger to my door, then collapse in the hallway.

Luckily, my brother is just coming out of the bathroom. He screams for Mom.

She cradles me in her arms.

"Are you OK?"

I understand her words perfectly.

But when I open my mouth, only sing-songy gibberish come out. I've forgotten how to speak English. Later, I would realize it was because my left brain was off, and that's where most people, including me, store language.

The next day, Dr. Golden (my neurologist) shows me, on a chart, how my seizures only affect half of my brain. That means, for some reason, I will grow out of them. The gist of what she's telling me is, "We don't know nothin' about the brain."

She maps my brainwaves on an EEG. Strange, alpha-wave patterns. Like I'm in a deep trance.

Dr. Golden, as far as my parents and I can remember (I called them to ask), gave us a shrug and some medication. They don't know why or how it works *at all*; but take it twice a day with a meal ;).

This experience has colored my entire life. I would have never become a writer if I hadn't lost the ability to communicate when I was twelve, which helped create my obsession with language.

## Who is the ~~write~~ right brain?

Patients with [severed connections](#) between hemispheres exhibit behaviors that suggest each side of the brain has a unique personality. The left brain may like *Friends*, but the right brain likes *The Matrix*.

A whole other “person” quietly lives in the right hemisphere of your brain.

Most people never meet that person—but it mutely watches you go through the world, only able to nudge you here and there with dreams and intuitions.

I did meet that person. Or, rather, I *was* him for a couple of hours while my left brain re-booted.

He is unlike the left brain—orderly, segmented, and predictable. He is intuitive, creative, and a future seer. To him, there is no boundary between your ass and the chair. They are all just wiggling parts of the same whole.

The right brain—normally silent—is the inner storyteller.

## Dostoevsky's seizures

Dostoevsky, widely agreed to be one of the most genius storytellers in history, had seizures.

He had a rare kind known as “ecstatic epilepsy,” which basically means that he had a good time while seizing up. He claimed he would have traded his entire life to have had them.

Freud tried to discount them as a mere symptom of his psychosis—but given what we know now about epilepsy and mystical states, that seems unlikely.

Dostoyevsky said it allowed him to experience “unbounded joy and rapture, ecstatic devotion and completest life.” That sounds exactly like what people say when in a mystical experience—which is a [well-documented phenomenon](#).

And, let's not forget, this was the man who wrote *Crime and Punishment*. We can't exactly write him off as a nut.

## Meditation brain mapping

Nineteen years later, I'm sitting at a meditation event. I've been randomly selected to have my brain mapped on an EEG.

A scientist is squirting gel into my hair to create an electrical current from my brain to the electrode. I'm sitting in a chair in a row of thirty-five other test subjects. She's busy working to stick the electrodes through my curly mop, and we're chatting.

"I used to have seizures," I mention.

"Really?" she says. She has a Ph.D. in neuroscience. "That's so funny you mention seizures. Before this event, I would have told you that it was impossible for a human being to sustain gamma brain-wave patterns for more than a second unless they had a grand mal seizure. Now I see gamma brainwaves twice a day. It's *not* a seizure, but it looks like one on the EEG. I still can't believe it."

"Are you serious?" I say.

"Yes," she says, shaking her head. "The data is insane. We are just scratching the surface of what all of this means."

## Dr. Jill Taylor's stroke of insight

Dr. Jill Taylor had [a stroke](#), which shut down the left side of her brain—leaving her only on the right side. She explains the event in beautiful detail in her TED talk linked above.

She was exposed to the mindset of the right hemisphere. That's something that a bunch of left-brain dominant people like us finds *hard* to understand. She met her inner storyteller.

In that state, there is no worry or fear because there is no separateness. No ego. There is only pure oneness with the "mind of God."

We're at a place in science (including [psychedelic research](#), ~~which is a whole different rabbit hole~~) where we can no longer avoid religious language.

## What all this teaches us about storytelling

People usually use magical language when discussing creativity: "The muse." "Inspiration." "God worked through me."

After my experiences, I can't help but think this is a poorly-understood neurological phenomenon. Maybe there is a genius creative hiding in each of us if only our analytical left brain could get out of the way.

Sometimes a malfunction in the brain seems to make that possible. After all, the creative genius of Dostoevsky shook the entire world—and people still marvel at what he managed to do today. We shouldn't take that lightly.

All you have to do is be brave enough (or lucky enough) to shut down the part of your brain that loves the *known*. The left brain might be all that stands in your way of creative greatness.

Creativity requires discomfort. It requires courage. It requires stepping beyond the veil of what you know into the blackness of what could be. That doesn't necessarily mean a seizure, but we can follow the valuable breadcrumbs left behind by extreme experiences.

Sometimes it's as simple as a daily habit of morning pages, taking a walk, or having difficult conversations with people we love. Anytime you do something difficult and worthwhile, you're closer to the inner storyteller.

Here's the takeaway: It's all worth it. For me, having seizures was worth it for the same reason writing a novel was worth it.

Everything that makes me *feel* more than I understand is worth it.

There may be a god of creativity hiding in each of us.